

Berks Nature talk focuses on water

BY BECCA Y. GREGG
READING EAGLE

In the ballroom at the Crowne Plaza Reading in Wyomissing on Thursday morning, a group of Kutztown middle schoolers gathered around, excited eyes pointed toward an interactive table centerpiece.

There, in the middle of that and other tables across the room sat what Berks Nature President Kim Murphy described as a "mini-enviroscape."

"This mini represents a watershed," Murphy said to a packed room of Berks business community members, educators and others at the nonprofit's annual State of the Environment breakfast. "Land is very important to the water cycle. The combined effect of pollution from many small sources can have a real impact on the quality of our shared water resources."

Murphy instructed the students and others in the room to pour onto the enviroscape four small cups of pollutants — one representing animal waste, another fertilizer, soil and finally, chemicals and pesticides.

"Now, I want you to make it rain on your watershed," she said, referring to the spray bottles filled with water on each table. "What's happen-

ing? A lot of runoff. So everything we do to our land ultimately affects our water. The fewer pollutants that get into the water to begin with, the less expensive it is to treat it and the better it is for all of us."

Berks Nature, formerly known as the Berks Conservancy, focused on the importance of watersheds at Thursday's event.

"Everybody in that room needs to care about water. But we all take it for granted," said Tami Shimp, Berks Nature's vice president of development and community relations. "I'm hoping this kind of just raises it on people's radar a little more. Let's learn about it and protect it before it's an emergency."

Among those who came out were representatives from the Reading Area Water Authority, Western Berks Water Authority and Pennsylvania American Water, in addition to students from the Kutztown, Brandywine, Tulpehocken and Wilson school districts, and teachers from other Berks districts.

Dr. Gerald Kauffman, director of the University of Delaware Water Resources Center, spoke on the importance of the Delaware River Watershed for Berks and surrounding regions, both economically and environmentally.



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Kimberly J. Murphy, president of Berks Nature, speaks at the organization's annual State of the Environment breakfast Thursday at the Crowne Plaza Reading, Wyomissing. The event focused on the importance of protecting watersheds.

"Berks County is a headwaters county," Kauffman told the audience. "These are very important areas to protect."

The projectors behind him showed a list: Boeing, Campbell's, Yuengling, the New York Yankees, Boscov's, the Guggenheim Museum, Cabela's, Wawa, Starbucks.

"What do all these enterprises have in common?" Kauffman asked. "They all rely on the waters of the Delaware River Basin. So think about our industry, our commerce. We wouldn't have that without having the waters of the Schuylkill and the Delaware River Basin."

Crossing four states and encompassing 43 percent of Pennsylvania's population, the Delaware River Basin provides drinking water for about 5 percent of the country. And although much progress has been made in recent decades to clean up the water and the environment in general, Kauffman added,

"There's still a ways to go."

Studies have shown the Delaware River Basin in all four states to provide about \$25 billion to the regional economy and to be the driving force behind more than 600,000 direct or indirect jobs, Kauffman said. Among the areas that are driving in dollars: revenue from recreational activities like boating, skiing, fishing, hunting, bird watching and craft brewing.

"Take Blue Marsh Lake," Kauffman said. "It has provided over \$87 million in flood damage prevented so far downstream. So it's not only a recreational resource, but an economic resource."

One can conclude that watersheds are "significant drivers of the local economy," he added. "If you improve the quality of the water and the habitat, you'll see an increase in the economic value of all those sectors that I talked about."

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